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ABSTRACT

This report examines the rural principal's role by investigating the attitudes of rural school teachers who have "principal potential." Interviews were carried out with 25 teachers from 5 rural school districts who were identified by their peers as having school leadership potential. Respondents were asked to reflect on advantages and disadvantages associated with the principal's role. Only five of the teachers interviewed expressed interest in becoming principals. Others either were not interested or stated that the principal's role would have to change significantly before they would consider it. They viewed the role of the principal as: (1) too distant from the instructional core; (2) involving too many non-instructional duties; (3) too large to perform duties effectively; (4) requiring too much time away from family; (5) providing too little direct contact with students; (6) requiring behaviors that do not match personality; (7) affecting existing relationships with teachers; (8) lacking autonomy and control; (9) seldom offered to a woman; (10) disciplinarian, affecting relationships with students; (11) too political; and (12) needing redefinition. To attract teacher-leaders into the rural school principalship, the principal's role should focus more on instructional leadership and activities that directly affect students. School restructuring suggestions should be carried out so that more educational decisions are made at the school level, school cultures become more collegial, and more female teacher-leaders are encouraged to become principals. (LP)

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BECOME A PRINCIPAL? YOU MUST BE KIDDING

by: J. Casey Hurley

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Become a Principal? You Must Be Kidding

Study Purpose

When I recently told a friend of mine that I was studying why teachers either did or did not aspire to the principalship, she said, "That's a stupid study." She is a hospital administrator, and she assumed that teachers would aspire to become principals, just like health administrators aspire to become the hospital CEO.

But do teachers aspire to become principals? Are the right ones aspiring to become principals? If not, what are the conditions of principals' work which discourage teachers from seeking this vital school leadership role? This final question was explored with 25 teachers who were identified by their peers as having principal potential.

Recent research on the principalship has identified the professional skills and qualities of effective school leaders. Although this line of research has improved our understanding of effective school leadership, the underlying assumption of these studies is that ineffective school leadership is due to the inadequacies of the individuals in the principal's office. Because we have not critically examined this assumption, we have plenty of literature, and even a national principals' professional development program (the LEAD program), which have focused almost exclusively on improving the skills of those in the principal's office. Unfortunately, though, we have few other ideas for improving school leadership.

The most recent suggestions for improving school leadership are found in "Principals for our Changing Schools" (Thomson, 1993), which establishes knowledge and skill bases for principals. It is important to recognize that the thrust of this publication is the same as earlier "effective principals" literature. The underlying assumption is also the same--in order to improve school leadership, we need to improve the skills and knowledge of principals. Although this approach is logical and straightforward, it has obscured other ways to improve school leadership.

Just as focusing a camera on the foreground blurs the background, focusing on principals' inadequacies blurs questions about the norms and expectations which surround principals' work. This study, instead of focusing on the inadequacies of practicing and aspiring principals, asks teachers who have been identified as potentially effective principals to explain their perspectives on the role norms, expectations, and work conditions confronting rural school principals. Instead of assuming that schools are poorly led because of inadequately skilled principals, this study assumes that ineffective school leadership is also closely related to the way the principalship is defined and to the norms and expectations which have grown up around the role.

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A recent report by the New York State School Board's Association recommended restructuring the principal's role (New York School Boards Association, 1988). Among other things the report recommended a team approach to school leadership, more principal autonomy, and more communication among school board members and principals. Little empirical research, however, was cited to support these recommendations. So, although the New York report was sympathetic to the plight of principals, unless researchers provide data which both substantiate the need to redefine the principal's role and suggest ways to restructure school leadership roles, it is unlikely that restructuring or redefining recommendations will be implemented, much less sustained over time. The purpose of this study is to provide data which suggest how we ought to consider redefining school leadership roles.

There are two reasons why, especially in rural schools, we need to ask more questions about the way the principal's role is defined. First, the scope of the rural principal's role is broad. We need to ask if it is reasonable to expect rural principals to be head disciplinarians, instructional leaders, managers of the business and facility operations, and links to the community, when urban and suburban principals have assistant principals and central office personnel who accept many of these responsibilities. Regardless of school size, principals deal with curriculum issues within each discipline and grade level. Therefore, small school size does not proportionately reduce these responsibilities. Furthermore, the number of extra-curricular programs is almost as great in small schools as in large ones. In other words, the scope of administrative responsibilities is greater for rural principals because they have fewer assistant principals and central office staff to accept some of the responsibilities that are often delegated in urban and suburban districts. Do these conditions foster the kind of instructional leadership needed in rural schools?

Secondly, it is important to reevaluate the rural principal's role because it is difficult to attract and keep high quality educational leaders in rural school districts. Jacobson (1988) calls rural school districts the school administration "farm system" because novice school administrators often gain experience in rural districts before accepting positions in suburban and urban schools; therefore, the analogy with baseball "farm" teams preparing players for the major leagues. One way rural district superintendents combat the "farm system" phenomenon is to hire from within, to fill administrative vacancies with district teachers who have "principal potential." When hiring principals and assistant principals, rural school district superintendents often look to their own teaching ranks, hoping to hire an individual who is a potentially effective leader and who is already committed to living in that specific rural area. Teachers interviewed for this study are just this type of individual. They are rural school district teachers who were nominated for participation in this study because of their school leadership potential.

This study gathers data about the rural principal's role by examining it through the eyes of rural

school teachers who have "principal potential." This is a good place to start if we want to attract high quality educational leaders into the rural school principalship and examine the role norms and expectations which have grown up around principals' work. These teachers' reasons for deciding not to become principals provide insight into those aspects of the rural principal's role which ought to be re-examined. For example, many of these rural teachers reported that the scope of the role affects the opportunities rural principals have for providing effective school leadership. Empirical data of this type may form the foundation for efforts to redefine and improve school leadership. According to the New York State School Board's Association (1988; 1), "All the signs indicate that now is the time for a fundamental reevaluation of the principalship..."

This study complements the research which identified the skills of effective principals. Certainly we should work to improve the skills and knowledge of practicing principals. In doing so, it is important to consider that, perhaps one of the reasons we have principals with poor skills is that highly skilled individuals choose not to seek the principalship. If both lines of research are brought together, we will not only have a better understanding of the knowledge and skills needed to effectively lead schools, but we will also know why some of our most promising school leaders choose not to become principals. These data can help us redefine the rural principal's role in ways that will make it more attractive for potentially effective school leaders and more feasible for current principals.

Study Participants

Participants in this study were identified by their peers as teachers with "principal potential." Superintendents of five rural county school districts in a Southeastern state were asked to distribute nomination forms to their central office staff, and principals were asked to nominate study participants and distribute nomination forms to teachers in their schools. Four of the districts are single-high school districts, and the other district has two high schools. Nominators were asked to list the names of teachers throughout their district who have "principal potential." They were also asked to write down their reasons for selecting those teachers.

Using a county-wide approach helped maintain confidentiality for nominators and nominees. Most of the nominations were made by people in the same school as the nominee, but that is to be expected because nominators have the most knowledge of the abilities of teachers in their own schools. Nominators were strongly urged to nominate teachers because of their potential as a principal, not because they were in graduate school or displayed an interest in becoming a principal. In all, 253 teachers submitted nominations, as did 20 principals, and 16 central office

staff. Consequently, in most cases, the top nominees were the teachers who their fellow teachers felt had "principal potential." Table 1 summarizes the nomination information. It approximates the sizes of the district teaching and administrative staffs and shows how many teachers and administrators actually participated in the nominating process. The last column shows the approximate percentage participation in the nominating process. Approximations are used to maintain the confidentiality of the participants and their districts.

Table 1

County	Approximate totals (teach's, princ's, C.O.)	Actual Submissions (teach's, princ's, C. O.)	Approx. %'s (teach's, princ's, CO)
#1	450, 15, 20	98, 13, 9	22, 87, 45
#2	230, 8, 15	46, 1, 4	20, 12, 27
#3	170, 8, 10	33, 1, 0	19, 12, 0
#4	150, 10, 10	23, 5, 3	15, 50, 30
#5	210, 10, 10	53, 0, 0	25, 0, 0

Twenty-five of the top 31 nominees were selected to be interviewed. The six who were not selected were eliminated because they had recently been my graduate students, and their interview responses may have been influenced by their previous experiences with me. The district by district breakdown resulted in seven teachers being interviewed from the largest district, five teachers from two districts, and four teachers from the other two districts. All the respondents are veteran teachers; the least experienced has been teaching for seven years. Seventeen are white women and eight are white men. Fourteen are elementary school teachers, two are middle school teachers, and nine are high school teachers.

To conclude this profile, it is important to point out that, of the twenty-five interviewees, only five teachers with "principal potential"--one from each county-- said they were interested in becoming principals. Seven respondents said, "maybe," and thirteen said, "no." This tells us something about the attractiveness of the principal's role. Even if we assume that the six excluded nominees would seek the principalship, only 11 of the top thirty-one potentially effective principals (according to their colleagues) are interested in becoming principals. What may be even more telling is that thirteen of the 31 said they were <u>not</u> interested in becoming a principal. Finally, it should be noted that the "maybe's" said that the principal's role would have to change significantly before they would consider it. We can conclude from this that 20 of the 31 potentially most

effective school leaders are unwilling to become principals as the role is now defined.

Data Collection

I traveled to each study participant's school to conduct a 35-45 minute interview which asked about the nominee's perspective on the principal's role. Interviews were conducted between January 3 and May 10, during the spring semester of 1992.

The first question was open-ended. Respondents were told to pretend that certification requirements were not a consideration, and to reflect on those aspects of the principal's role that would have to change before they would apply for a principalship. Then they were asked to complete the following sentence, "I would seek a principalship if..." After this question, probes were used to direct the respondents' thinking to specific role requirements, and norms of principal's behavior. Other probes explored their perspectives on principals' professional relationships, and how their own personal or family circumstances would have to change before they would seek a principalship. For example, one probe was, "Is there anything about the norms for principals' behavior which makes you say to yourself, 'That's not for me. That would have to change.'?"

A second open-ended question was used to explore the opposite side of this issue: "I want to become a principal because..." Respondents were asked to explain what attracts them to the principal's role. Probes were used again, this time asking for specific role requirements, norms of behavior, professional relationships, and personal and family effects they find attractive. The following is an example of this second type of probe: "Is there anything about principals' professional relationships that attracts you to the role?"

Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed word for word. The recording equipment worked well, and all interviews are complete, except for a few portions where the respondents voice was too distant or too soft for the transcriber to hear. Notes were also taken to capture the emphasis and tone of the comments, and to give nonverbal feedback to the reapondents.

These two lines of questioning result in two sets of data--aspects of the rural principal's role which attract teachers and those which repel them. This paper discusses only those aspects of the role which teachers report as barriers to seeking the principalship. Both the quantities and qualities of the interviewecs' reflections are presented. Table 2 summarizes response frequencies, and actual quotations indicate participants' attitudes and reasoning. The code after each quote indicates

the respondent's gender, teaching level, and district. For example, "F, ES, #4" stands for a female elementary school teacher in District 4.

Data Presentation

The following chart summarizes the data. The first column indicates the theme or concern , the second column indicates the number of times the concern was mentioned, the third column indicates the number and grade level of the teachers who mentioned it, and the fourth column indicates the number of districts represented in these concerns.

Table 2

Theme	Times Mentioned	Number of Teachers	Districts
1. too distant from instructional core	16	12 -- 8E, 2M, 2H	5
2. too many non-instructional duties	14	12 -- 9E, 1M, 2H	5
3. the role is too large	13	8 -- 4E, 1M, 3H	5
4. requires too much time away from family	12	10 -- 5E, 1M, 4H	4
5. too little direct contact with students	10	7 -- 5E, 1M, 1H	4
6. behavior norms don't match personality	10	9 -- 6E, 1M, 2H	5
7. relationships with teachers would change	9	8 -- 4E, 0M, 4H	4
8. too little autonomy and control	9	9 -- 6E, 0M, 3H	4
9. being a woman is a big disadvantage	8	4 -- 2E, 0M, 2H	2
10. principal must be disciplinarian	6	6 -- 2E, 1M, 3H	2
11. too much politics	5	5 -- 1E, 0M, 4H	3
12. the role needs to be totally redefined	5	4 -- 2E, 1M, 1H	3

The most frequently mentioned reason for not seeking the principalship was that the role of the principal is too distant from the instructional core of the school. This was mentioned 16 times. Closely related to this concern is the perception that principals deal with too much paperwork and non-instructional duties. This was mentioned 14 times. Taken together, these concerns are two sides of the same coin--not enough time for instructional responsibilities and too many non-instructional tasks. Apparently, classroom teachers believe that principals' work takes them farther from, not closer to, the central purposes of the school. The following comments were made by

teachers in three of the districts.

> I would seek the role if more emphasis in the principal's leadership would be on curriculum and staff development rather than running the physical plant of the school. (F, ES, #1)

> I do not want to be a manager of bus schedules and of lunch lines and that sort of thing. I know we have a problem in a school district this size. The principal has to wear a lot of hats. It's just that it seems the principal, whoever he (she) is when he (she) comes in, becomes consumed with those things. (M, HS, #3)

> ...from what I see in this county, and that's all I can speak for, it seems to me that the principalship role right now is not involved enough with instruction and curriculum. Maybe curriculum is just my thing. Maybe I like that better but I see them involved with more business-type roles than they are in educational roles and I think there needs to be some requirements for principals to be involved with the curriculum and what is going on within their schools. (F, ES, #5)

Another category of responses reflects teachers' concerns about the size of the principal's role and the time it requires away from the family. Thirteen references were made to the enormity of the job, and 12 comments focused on how this would affect their families.

> Okay. If I can say just one thing, that one of the points that I think I'm eluding to more than anything else is that perhaps the job of principals today involves more than one man (woman) can handle and I think probably the roles and responsibilities generally assigned to one man (woman) in the school system, that we call principal, needs to be divided and dispensed among several different people. (M, HS, #1)

> I think that as a principal the time requirement would be even greater than that involved in coaching. You have to be here early, you have to stay late, you have to come to every meeting, you have to go to every PTA and parent meeting, you have to go to Board of Education meetings, etc. The time involvement is just immense. My family would have to adjust to that. I think that would be a big adjustment for them, and my family is important to me. (M, ES, #2)

> When you assume the role of a principal, you are looking almost at a 20-hour a day job by the time the parents call you at night and different meetings are set up and all. If you assume the role of the principal, I don't see how you could possibly get into anything else. (M, ES, #4)

A third concern expressed by the teachers relates to the first one--being too distant from the instructional purposes of the school. Many teachers said principals do not have enough direct contact with students and some said they did not value the kinds of relationships principals develop with students. This concern was mentioned 10 times by seven different teachers.

> ...the bottom line is I (would) miss the contact with the children...becoming a part of their life is really what you do when you see them each day and maybe somewhere along the way you can help them out a little bit by being that involved with them. (F, ES, #1)

> I teach school because I love children. I guess the reason I haven't chosen to go into administration is that I see that, in one sense, as getting away from children. So, I would probably seek to go into administration if I could see that I could benefit children more than I can in the classroom. If I see it, which is the way I see it now, as getting away from children and not really being able to do something to their benefit, then I would seek it -- if I could help children out in that role. But, I haven't really seen that at this point in time. (M, ES, #2)

> I don't view being a principal as being very positive because you lose the touch of the children. You lose that daily one-to-one personal interaction. There is interaction but it is not like it is in the classroom. You lose that personal contact. You become more of a thing rather than their teacher or the person that they could go to. You become an authority figure. A teacher is an authority figure but in a different way. She (He) is an instructional authority figure but if you have a splinter you go to her (him) or if you hurt your knee you go to her (him), or when Momma and Daddy have a fuss and you are upset you go to her (him). There may be a little wall between the office of the principal and the child. (F, ES, #3)

Another set of comments indicate that some norms of principal behavior do not match individual teachers' personalities. Eight teachers reflected on the ways principals were expected to behave and said they did not want to behave in those ways. One teacher said, "I see a lot of administrators as a controller type...I am not a controller...I don't like anybody to get their feelings hurt." (F, MS, #1)

Another said,

> There are times that the principal has to put his (her) foot down and say, 'this is it, or this is it.' And I'm one of those that tend to like to straddle the fence a lot-- 'Well, I see what you're talking about, and I see what you're talking about.' But there are times when a principal has to get aggressive and say, 'This is it, period.' (F, ES, #1)

A related concern of seven teachers was that relationships with teaching colleagues change significantly when one becomes a principal.

> I think anytime you have years of teaching, it's immediately hard to displace that and move into another role and still maintain the respect or maintain the same kind of awareness with your fellow teachers as you had. I think that would involve almost a change -- the change in role from being a teacher respected on the faculty to being a leader because, immediately, they look at you differently. I think that part would become very difficult. (F, ES, #2)

A high school teacher commented, "...because it is a small situation (community), it's probably hard for a principal to have friends...I mean it looks like you've got buddies on your faculty or whatever. As far as living in the community, I think that might be difficult." (F, HS, #3)

A male high school teacher shared the following thought,

> I guess the "us and them" is one of the worst I see with teachers and administrators. They are in their padded leather chairs and we're down here in the trenches fighting the battle. They are up there with their laser pointers saying, 'Well, we need to move some troops over here and do battle tomorrow.' (M, HS, #5)

Eight teachers reflected on principals' lack of autonomy in the workplace, and they said principals would need more control and autonomy before they would seek the principalship.

> (I would seek a principalship) If I had more control over what happened at my school and I did not have so many regulations coming from the state level and the county office level--those kinds of restrictions. (F, ES, #2)

> (I would seek a principalship) If the school board had less power in things such as moving principals from one school to another, less power in changing a principal's decision and those things. That would be the only thing that I could think of right now that is a big thing with me.
>
> ...Well, to me, I can't really see anything else. That would be the big change. If I had the total control over the school... (M, HS, #4)

Another set of comments relates to the principal's disciplinary role. Five teachers said they did not relish being the school disciplinarian.

> I think teachers, many times, and I think that this probably is true of parents as well, expect

> the high school principal to handle all the discipline that goes on and I think it's very unrealistic to expect one man (woman) in particular to be able to handle discipline throughout the entire school. (M, HS, #1)

> When the principal is gone, I am in charge, and they find a substitute (teacher) for me. My job is to go out there in the lunch room and simply do damage control. That's not only humiliating, but it is frustrating and completely antithetical to teaching at all. I think that is one thing a principal should do is be a teacher. (M, HS, #3)

The politics of school leadership was also a concern. Five teachers in three different districts said there is too much politics surrounding the principalship.

> The second thing that came to my mind is that I would not want it to be such a political job...I think in this county in the past... Maybe it has changed with our last superintendent but sometimes if the right people in the community decide they don't like the principal and they don't want the principal, he's gone. It's just as political as that. If the right people with the right kind of political pull decide they want someone out of the job. (F, ES, #3)

Another teacher said,

> It seems as though those who are willing to step out and really make a difference and go against some of the opposing (people), or some of the people that have been here for thirty or forty years, seem to always be the ones that move on very quickly.
> ...Their (principals') opinions shift to fit the group or something...I disagree with that. I think that right up front you have to agree to disagree without holding grudges and be able to work these situations out. Of course maybe I'm being idealistic but I think this has worked for me so far. (M, HS, #4)

Another teacher in the same county commented, "Well, I hate the politics that makes the principal have to please the board of education and the board members." (F, HS, #4)

The issue of gender was on the minds of four teachers in two districts. Female teachers in two districts said that being a woman puts them at such a disadvantage for becoming a principal that they have chosen not to pursue the principalship. One teacher, when asked to finish the open-ended sentence, "I would seek a principalship if..." immediately said, "If they would hire a woman." (F, HS, #1)

A female elementary school teacher in another district commented,

> I feel that we as women don't have much of a chance to gain any kind of position in an administrative role in this particular county. I strongly feel that we're up against a "good old boys' club," and I think that's a big obstacle...the doors are closed...I just don't see that it's even a possibility because we've had women who are viable and they haven't gotten top positions. (F, ES, #2)

Finally, five teachers came right out and said that the principal's role was in need of total redefinition. Three of their comments follow:

> See, I've thought about this and I really feel that the role of the principal needs to be totally redefined and restructured. (F, ES, #2)

> You can't pay me enough to do that. I mean for what I am going to lose. (M, HS, #3)

> I'm saying I don't think there are enough hours in the day for me to do all the things I think would be necessary to do. (F, MS, #5)

Policy Implications

So, what can we conclude from these data? If we want teachers with "principal potential" to pursue the principalship, how should we redefine the principal's role?

The following list reviews the 12 themes which emerge from the data. The number in parentheses indicates the number of times each theme was mentioned. Interviewees believed that the principal's role:

1. is too distant from the instructional core. (16)
2. includes too many non-instructional duties. (14)
3. is too large. (13)
4. requires too much time away from the family. (12)
5. has too little direct contact with students. (10)
6. requires behaviors that don't match his/her personality. (10)
7. changes existing relationships with teachers. (9)
8. lacks autonomy and control. (9)

9. is seldom offered to a woman. (8)
10. involves discipline, which affects relationships with students (6)
11. involves too much politics (5)
12. needs to be totally redefined (5)

First, the findings of this study suggest that the rural principal's job is too large. This is suggested not only by theme three, but also by taking together themes 2, 3, and 4. Unless school board members at both the state and local levels shrink the range and number of non-instructional role demands placed on rural principals, it is unlikely that they will get close to the school's instructional core, which is considered a key to effective school leadership.

Many of these teachers are not interested in the principalship as long as it centers on non-instructional duties. According to them, the principal's job; as defined by the norms and expectations of school board members, teachers, students, and parents; has little to do with improving schools, but has much to do with completing reports, maintaining school grounds and equipment, attending meetings with other educators, and attending after school activities. Many of them believe that, in so far as they want to be educators and leaders, the principalship is not for them. The irony is obvious.

If policymakers would eliminate many of the principal's non-instructional duties, what other responsibilities would make the principalship more educational, more leadership oriented, and more attractive to teachers with "principal potential?" The data suggest that the role of the principal should be defined closer to the central purposes of the school.

Specifically, theme one suggests that principals be more involved in instructional programming, and theme five suggests that the role be defined in close proximity to students. We know teachers enter the profession because of a desire to work with young people, now we should exploit this motivation to also attract the best teacher-leaders into the principalship. It is interesting to note that the assistant principal's role is usually defined closer to students. The findings of this study suggest that this is an area for redefinition. Maybe we should not assume that the higher status position should be the one more distant from students. Taken together, these two themes suggest that the principal's role would be more attractive to teachers with principal potential if it centered on instructional programming and student services--closer to the school's central purposes.

Another direction for redefining the principal's role is suggested in theme eight. Several teachers noted that principals have little autonomy. This perception reflects the need for site-based management in education. If school districts reorganize and embrace the principles of site-based management, principals would have more control and autonomy; which, in turn, may attract more

teachers with principal potential into the principalship.

Theme seven corresponds to another school organization initiative--the need for building collegial school cultures. If school organizational structures become flatter and more collegial, teachers would have less reason to be wary of the "us versus them" attitude. The data from this study suggest that more teachers with principal potential will seek school leadership positions when schools become more collegial.

Regarding theme eleven, it is unlikely that policymakers can or should do much to change how politics surrounds school administration. It is unlikely that anything can change because it is school board members themselves who are the policymakers. Besides, it would be futile to try to separate education from politics. Educational leadership is inherently political, as Hodginkinson (1991; 36) points out: "Educational purposes are always politically open...purposes are endlessly subject to debate, critique, and argument through the polity."

Similarly, little can be done to accommodate the personalities of teachers who are uncomfortable with certain leadership behaviors (theme six). Looking closely at teachers' theme six comments, however, reveals teachers' belief that principals manipulate others and make unpopular, final decisions. This perception is closely related to themes seven and eight. Therefore, it is instructive to note that, if principals could work in site-managed, collegial schools and could focus more on student services and instructional programming responsibilities, they would be functioning less as autocrats and more as members of decision-making teams. Consequently, addressing themes seven and eight might also address some of the personality fit concerns expressed in theme six.

Finally, it is clear from the comments of participants in this study that females continue to face barriers to administrative careers (theme nine). In my discussions with interviewees about this issue, the four women who felt gender was an issue in hiring principals made it clear that this was not a minor barrier, but a major, deep-seated disadvantage that they recognized and resented--not in an emotional sense, but in an intellectual one. Female enrollments in educational administration programs have increased during the last 15 years, but these four teachers realized that gatekeepers are still mostly men. Although they were aware that the gender disadvantage may evaporate over time, they did not see this happening soon enough for them to become principals. When pressed on whether or not they would try to break this barrier, they expressed a "wait and see" attitude.

This attitude has implications for attracting the most experienced and capable female educators into the principalship. Unless gatekeepers do more to encourage and promote experienced, female teacher-leaders into the principalship, we will lose the benefits of their leadership potential.

Conclusion

It is important to remember that the people who participated in this study are not principals; therefore, these data do not reflect the disgruntlement of principals. Instead, they reflect the attitudes of the teachers we hope will pursue the principalship. It is clear that these people are not likely to pursue the principalship, and it is little wonder that so many recent reports on improving school leadership bemoan the lack of high quality candidates for the principalship. The principal's role, instead of being attractive to potentially effective principals, is considered to be a clerical and custodial job that has little to do with improving student learning.

In conclusion, and in answer to my hospital friend, many teachers do not aspire to the principalship. It is not the same kind of role held by the hospital CEO. One of the study participants told a story that summarizes the feelings of several teachers interviewed for this study:

> When I applied to the EdS. Program at Olympia University, I asked the acting principal here, at that time, to write me a recommendation. His recommendation said that Mr. Carter (interviewee) really would like to improve his life be becoming principal. I could not believe it! I mean that would be the last thing on my mind. Why would I want to do that? That's what he wanted to do. That's where he was coming from, but it sure isn't like that to me!

The findings of this study suggest that, in order to attract teacher-leaders into the rural school principalship, we should redefine the principal's role. It ought to be more focused on the school's central purposes and on the activities that directly affect students' lives. Then, if school restructuring suggestions are carried out so that more educational decisions are made at the school level, school cultures become more collegial, and more female teacher-leaders are encouraged to become principals, we will be improving the possibility that teachers with principal potential will be more attracted to the principal's role.

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